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ABSTRACT

Despite the failure of recent research to demonstrate some of the "promise" of early field experiences for teachers, early experiences retain substantial appeal and should provide important diagnostic information relating to the needs of the teacher preparation program. The early field experience, an exercise in the teacher preparation program, occurs prior to student teaching and requires students to serve as teacher aides in local secondary schools. A study was designed to provide information that might begin to pinpoint important patterns or changes in student attitudes as a result of this experience. Subjects were 50 teacher preparation students enrolled in an education class that required them to spend 3 hours a week for 12 weeks in a local secondary school as a teacher's aide, plus 1 hour in a weekly lecture on campus. The Teacher Concerns Questionnaire was administered to them before and after the teaching experience. Results showed that the students' concerns seem not to have been dramatically affected by the field experiences. Other findings are also reported and conclusions drawn. (JMK)

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The Early Field Experience and The Preservice Teacher's Concerns

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The early field experience has been a part of many teacher education programs in recent years and, according to Hardy and Mershon (80-81), its popularity is increasing. This approach to teacher education is not new. Nolan (1982) has indicated that as early as 1904, Dewey advocated the implementation of "...professional laboratory experiences ...early in the preservice preparation program...that should supply the control of the intellectual methods and materials which are required for ultimate mastery of practical skills."

More recently, teacher education graduates have consistently argued that field experiences are vital to their preparation (Applegate and Lasley, 1982; Martin, 79/80). In connection with that notion, a number of assumptions have been made in support of the early field experience including these: the experience measures the student's commitment to education (Elliott and Mays, 1979), the experience serves as a link between theory and practice (Nicklas et al, 1982; Nolan, 1982), and serves to enhance the student's interpersonal skills (Austin-Martin et al, 1982). Many of the assumptions have been challenged in recent literature (Willems, et al, 1982; Zeichner, 1980) even as some new approaches have demonstrated the value of the early field experience in different areas.* There is substantial disagreement in much of the recent writing on the subject.

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*Denton (1982), for example, demonstrated that the field experience has a positive effect on performance in subsequent coursework.

Foci of the Present Study

Despite the failure of recent research to demonstrate some of the early field experience's 'promise,' it retains substantial intuitive appeal and it would seem that the experience logically ought to provide, at the least, important diagnostic information relating to the needs of the preparation program generally, relying as it does on a practical " in the school" experience as a teaching tool. The early field experience, as it is referred to here, is an exercise in the teacher preparation program which occurs prior to student teaching and requires that the students serve as teacher's aides in the local secondary schools.

The present study asks:

1. How does participation in the experience alter preservice teachers' views?
2. What does the experience tell us about the preparing teacher's concerns?
3. What are the implications of those concerns and changes in concerns for teacher preparation programs?

Beyond knowing that students place value on the experience, not a great deal of information is available about how it influences attitude changes of participants. More specifically, we do not know whether such attitude changes (if indeed, they do occur) fall into discernible patterns. Clearly, the identification of such patterns must precede any attempt to modify teacher preparation programs in response to predictable configurations of attitude changes brought about as a consequence of exposure to early field experiences. This study was designed to provide information that might begin to pinpoint important patterns.

Procedures

We will rely on the concerns of participants in the early field experience as one approach to analyzing the effectiveness of the teacher preparation program. While scrutinizing preservice teachers' concerns in isolation would potentially be misleading it has merit; no one denies the importance of the teacher's (or in this case, the preservice teacher's) attitude toward the component elements of the teaching task.

The instrument used to measure concerns was the "Teacher Concerns Questionnaire" developed by Fuller and George of the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education at the University of Texas at Austin. The instrument is a 15-item, Likert-type scale designed to measure the concerns of the teaching professional. It asks for responses to 15 phrases that relate to the individual, the teaching task, and students. It defines being concerned about a thing as "thinking about it frequently and wanting to do something about it personally". A response of 1=not concerned, 2=a little concerned, 3=moderately concerned, 4=very concerned, and 5=extremely concerned.

The questionnaire is structured so that subscales for concerns about self, the teaching task, and the impact of the instruction on the student are available. An analysis procedure for those subscales is provided. The present application, however, did not fit that organization particularly well. The subjects in this study worked at the secondary schools for three hours, once a week for 12 consecutive weeks (there

was also a one-hour, on campus, weekly lecture). The field experience is sufficiently early in the preparation program that it is requested of the public school teachers who participate that the aides not be made responsible for entire classes. Consequently, when tutoring individuals or small groups is not possible, the bulk of the aide's time is consumed by noninstructional duties to a degree probably not reflecting the typical teacher's instructional-noninstructional ratio. For that reason, for this study, the questionnaire was formatted into subscales based on teacher-student relationships, other relationships and concerns about noninstructional duties.

In addition to response profiles associated with the broad categories subsumed by each subscale, responses to some individual items were examined. These questions focused on the review of responses to individual items: what are the areas of greatest concern? At this relatively early stage in their teacher preparation would lack of instructional material be a concern? Would there be a relationship suggested between that concern and such variables as the student's previous experience in education, or the student's sex, or class in school? Do any of those independent variables predict a student's concern about noninstructional duties?

Sample

The sample was a group of 50 teacher preparation students

enrolled in two sophomore level sections of the secondary level class entitled "The Profession of Teaching." The class calls for a three hour weekly lab session in the local schools as a teacher's aide for 12 weeks plus a one hour weekly lecture on the university campus. Of the students, 45 were female and 5 were male. They were predominantly sophomore level with 20 juniors and 5 seniors. None of the students had formal classroom teaching experience. Of the sample, 24 had taken no education classes, 18 had taken classes but had been involved in no classroom observation, and 4 students had taken classes and participated in classroom observation exercises previously.

Method

The "Teacher Concerns Questionnaire" was administered twice. It was given first during the first lecture of the term before students were involved in the field experience, and a second time toward the end of the term when the field experiences had concluded.

The independent variables of sex, class in the university and experience in the classroom were analyzed for their value as predictors of selected individual, subgroup and whole-group concerns. A multiple regression model (S.A.S.) was used. A paired comparison (S.A.S.) test was used to compare aggregate pretest scores with aggregate posttest scores.

The response variable was the number circled on the questionnaire (1 thru 5 in the case of individual responses),

or the sum of numbers circled (in the case of subgroup responses or total scores).

Results

The area of greatest concern was on those statements relating to the teacher-student relationships category. On the pretest the average response rating was 3.9. This figure rose to 4.14 on the posttest. The statements grouped to reflect relationships other than teacher-student had a pretest average of 3.1 and a posttest score that was the same. The category referring to the pressure of noninstructional duties and routine showed a gain from 2.35 to 2.5. Feelings of "other" inadequacies showed a mean gain of just .06, from 2.93 to 2.99.

The multiple regression models yielded the following: When the variables sex, experience, and year in school are used as predictors of the sub-group response variables, none of the results were significant.* When individual concerns over lack of instructional materials were considered, none of the independent variables were significant predictors in the pretest. In the posttest, however, the student's year in school was significant. The average response on posttest ranged from some concern for sophomores (average response=2.4), to moderate concern for juniors (average responses=3.1), to close to no concern among seniors (average response=1.3).

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*This was a pilot study. Significance levels were established at alpha=.1.

The student's year in school and an interaction of year and experience were significant predictors of concerns over noninstructional duties in the pretest but not in the posttest. The mean response to this item among sophomores was 1.83, among juniors it was 2.8, and among seniors it was 2.4. Sophomores with no previous education classes or observation experience had a mean response of 2.25. For sophomores with previous education classes, the average was 2.0 and that reduced to 1.5 for sophomores who also had observed classroom activity previously. The juniors fell into two groups; those without education classes showed a mean response of 2.8; those with classes had an average of 2.6. Seniors had the same grouping and had mean responses of 2.0 and 2.7 for no previous education classes and some classes respectively. Neither juniors nor seniors had previous observation experience.

Concern over receiving a favorable evaluation from the supervisor was found to be predicted significantly by sex in the pretest and by the subject's class in the posttest. On the pretest, the mean response by females on this item was 3.3. For males it was 2.0. On the posttest, the mean response for sophomores and juniors was 3.1. For seniors it was 1.4.

When student concerns were treated as an aggregate, an interaction of class and experience was significant predictor before the field experience and experience alone was a significant predictor at the conclusion of the course.

On the pretest, aggregate concerns averaged 46.6 for sophomores with no previous experience in education courses or formal classroom observation time. It moved up slightly to 47.1 and 47.0 for those who had taken other classes, and for those who had taken classes and performed observation respectively. For juniors without previous experience the mean was 50.8. For those juniors with previous experience the mean was 55.0. For seniors, the mean was 40 for those without previous experience and 56 for those who had taken classes before. On the posttest the mean for those with no previous experience was 49.5. For those with previous education classes it was 51.4 and it climbed slightly to 51.75 for those subjects who also had formally observed classroom activity prior to this field experience.

Finally, a paired test comparing the aggregate score of individual subject's pretest scores to the posttest scores yielded no significant difference.

Discussion

Some qualifications are relevant. The results should, perhaps, not be attributed entirely to the field experience. Though it seems logical that students would be most influenced by the field experience, the potential influence of the weekly lecture and the interaction with other teacher preparation students cannot be discounted completely. Additionally, sex as a predictor must be weighed against the underrepresentation of males in the sample.

It has been argued in support of early field experiences

that participants have the benefit of developing human relations aspect of the teacher's task earlier than otherwise (Austin-Martin). While the present study does not discount the possibility that such skills improve, concern over one aspect of them, teacher-student relationships, does not moderate, it in fact, grows more serious.

Generally speaking, the concerns seem not to have been dramatically effected by the field experience. When subgroup responses were subjected to multiple regression analysis, none of the individual variables were significant predictors of the subjects' concerns for that particular subgroup.

The fact that the subject's year in school was a significant predictor of concern over lack of instructional materials ought to be noted. The preparation program seems to diminish concern over lack of materials in the final semesters prior to student teaching.

Concerns over non-instructional duties seem to have been influenced by time in the actual secondary classroom. The early field experience provides a "leveling" effect here. Concerns voiced on the posttest were no longer a significant function of the student's class or an interaction of class or experience as was so on the pretest.

The results of the study would not support arguments that concerns generally are quieted by exposure to classroom situations (or, that concerns are increased). The paired test showed no significant difference in pretest v. posttest scores.

It is noteworthy that when aggregate concerns are considered, the only common variable that predicts significantly in both pre and posttests is experience. Subjects with varying degrees of experience clearly respond differently.

Conclusions

If practical use is to be made of these data, some follow-up work is required. A more precise examination of teacher-student relationships would permit us to ask whether, for example, more training in specific classroom management techniques is called for. It might be helpful to know whether there is any relationship between that concern and concern over lack of instructional materials.

It would be helpful to know whether the student's concern over receiving a favorable evaluation interferes with his/her ability to perform as expected when a supervisor is present.

Overall, the independent variables used in this study did not offer as much explanation as was hoped. Other variables such as the subject's teaching field and, perhaps, a comparison between elementary and secondary subjects would be instructive.

Fundamentally, this study suggests that besides providing an opportunity for "seasoning" the subject, or "initiating" teacher preparation students into the actual classroom the early field experience ought to provide diagnostic information for the related teacher preparation program at a time when adjustments in that program could still be made that would benefit the students from whom the data were collected.

Finally, it is hoped that findings here would be useful to those involved in other teacher education programs, but attempting to generalize from one early field experience to another is difficult because the experience has not been consistently defined in terms of measurable dimensions. There is a need for such definition.

TABLE 1

SELECTED MEANS

	SEX				EXPERIENCE						CLASS						YEAR			PRE * EXP.					
	PRE		POST		PRE			POST			PRE			POST			SOPH.			JR.			SR.		
	M	F	M	F	1	2	3	1	2	3	2	3	4	2	3	4	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES																									
Lack of Instructional materials																	2.25	2.0	1.5	2.8	2.6		2.0	2.7	
Noninstructional duties											1.83	2.8	2.4												
Concern over receiving favorable evaluation	2.01	3.3												3.1	3.1	1.4									
GROUP RESPONSES																									
Teacher-student relations	3.9		4.14																						
Other relationships	3.1		3.1																						
Noninstructional duties	2.35		2.5																						
Other inadequacies	2.93		2.99																						
AGGREGATE CONCERNS								49.55	51.45	51.75															

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